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# THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

1939

## 64th INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY ADYAR

MY DEAR BRETHREN THROUGHOUT  
THE WORLD :

### Mighty Days

How little most of us thought that the 64th International Convention of The Theosophical Society would be set in the midst of a world war, with all the ruthless barbarity that modern civilization makes possible to those belligerents which choose to stoop to use it. But the war is upon us, and we who are members of The Theosophical Society are called to use to our very utmost both our Theosophy and our membership of The Theosophical Society in the sacred cause of justice and of freedom, for there can be no true peace without them.

Our opportunity is wonderful, whoever we may be, wherever we may be, howsoever we may be circumstanced. There is

not a single member of our Society who is not endowed with some measure at least of the wisdom of Theosophy or with some strength at least from his membership of The Society.

Let each one of us use his wisdom and his strength wherever he is to make justice stronger and freedom truer. There is urgent need for justice and freedom in every part of the world in one form or in another. Justice and freedom need the help of neutral and belligerent alike.

Let us not, then, suffer these mighty days of a reincarnated Kurukshetra to pass without fighting for Righteousness as best we may be inspired.

### **Finland's Heroism**

The call to the myriad of Arjuna-members of The Theosophical Society throughout the world is to fight for the Right, for that Right which needs more honour, more observance, in every land. Listen to the call as our stricken brethren in Finland have answered it. I quote from a letter I received a fortnight ago from Mr. Rankka, Finland's General Secretary :

“As you know, we are here at present passing through a dangerous and

strenuous time. All the same, I think it wonderful to state how our people take this trial. All divergencies have disappeared and we stand as one man. The political parties have left their strife and are standing abreast in common defence for the country. Rich and poor, conservative and socialist, are doing offerings alike, material and spiritual. Our people are not filled with war enthusiasm, but they are every one of them firmly determined to do their utmost in defending their liberty and their country. Desiring a peaceful settlement, all of our people are prepared for the worse solution."

And he also writes: "It looks as [if] the outer connection should be broken in The Society, but we hope the inner connection, the Brotherhood of Humanity, is strong enough to surpass this troublesome time."

I venture to say that these are two great and historic utterances, and I say, too, that the high purpose of war is in part disclosed when the spirit of man is moved to so noble a declaration.

How magnificent a call to all his fellow-members are these words of our Finnish

brother, all the more so as they truly reflect the spirit of every member of the Finnish Section.

### **A Crusade against Wrong**

Would that in every land throughout the world such an utterance could be made in very truth. Every country is assailed by wrong, by injustice, by tyranny, within its frontiers. Every country has no less need of the disappearance of divergencies and of standing as one man. In every country is there urgent need for political parties to leave their strife and to stand abreast in common defence for the country against the wrongs that are disintegrating it. In every country should arise a mighty call for righting wrong wherever it may raise its ugliness, and in whatever form.

Must there be the Hitler madness and an outer aggression in order to call forth the soul of the peoples of the earth, true though it be that the Hitler madness and aggression have wonderfully called it forth in Britain and in France and in heroic Poland, and now in no less heroic Finland. Every one of these countries is now full of citizens dedicated in the very terms of Mr. Rankka's epic words.

And let us not forget China, a noble land indeed, ravished yet undismayed, laid low but to rise again triumphant.

As I write these words, the news comes that Finland has appealed for aid to the whole world. Very rightly does she appeal for aid against a barbarism that in enveloping her would enslave the world. But to what is she appealing? Is she appealing to civilization or to self-interest? Is she appealing to Brotherhood or to isolation? We shall very soon know, but the signs and portents are darkly unfavourable for Brotherhood. Self-interest and isolation are ever ready with their cheap words of sympathy. Only Brotherhood says little, but is rich in deeds.

Must the madness and aggression spread elsewhere before country after country shall awaken to the vital need of a crusade to sweep away all that is unworthy and to restore the great spirit which is the splendid background of every nation-people?

Emphatically do I say that even if a country be neutral to that front of the war which is to be perceived in Europe, it dare not in such revealing and catastrophic times as these be neutral to all that is

wrong within itself. Personally, I find it difficult to see how any country can be neutral even to the war in Europe as we see what that war will mean if it goes against the Allies—the denial of all that makes life worth living and the plunging even of such civilization as we have, and it amounts to less than many of us think, into a ruin from which it may take centuries to recover. The war is in fact a world-war on the many fronts where wrong stands arrayed against Right, and it does most surely involve all peoples and all countries without exception.

### **The Eternal Warfare**

But even if my opinion be wrong, do we not see before our very eyes a terrible aspect of the eternal combat between all that advances civilization and all that retards it? And can we escape from the conviction that such a combat, perhaps otherwise set, is even now taking place in our own countries, however neutral they may be to the setting of it in Europe? Is it not the insistent duty of every Theosophist to see this, be he neutral or belligerent? Is it not his duty to be belligerent at least among his fellow-citizens, calling his people to arise and to release their country's soul



from its imprisonment within the often criminal blindness of man's ignorance?

Is this not a time for all to fight, not necessarily in actual physical combat, but surely in moral, in emotional, in intellectual combat against the wrong that each perceives as such? Sincerely do I believe that our Elder Brethren bestowed upon us, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the transcendent gifts of Theosophy and of The Theosophical Society to the special purpose that the generations of mankind immediately succeeding this great gift-event should be well armed with the wisdom of Theosophy and the strength of membership of a movement dedicated to the active recognition of the truth of Universal Brotherhood: that they should so be well-armed that they might help the world to pass safely through the crucifixions of the two great wars, and to help to prepare the world, which was to become new, for a refreshment, an adjustment, of living in terms of those beautiful realities which make life that which it is designed and destined to be.

One war has already passed. A second war has begun its probing into the measure of our real worth. It is a war which

challenges us all—neutral and belligerent. Are we stirred? Are we stirred to our depths? Do we know that the war has an imperative message for every one of us: Change yourselves and help to change your world!

Let us make no mistake about the fact that this world war is not just a war between Germany and the allied peoples of Britain, France, Poland, and now *de facto* Finland. It is a world-wide war between Right and wrong, and between Right and wrong in the relations of the human with the sub-human kingdoms no less than in the human kingdom itself.

### **Pressing Wrongs in Every Land**

Hitler may be doing infinite wrong towards the Jews and towards the many peoples he has oppressed. Might may be his watchword and self-justification. But how many of us are doing grave wrong, or are condoning it, towards members of the animal kingdom, towards life in the vegetable and mineral kingdoms? How many of us are doing grave wrong, or are condoning it, to our brethren in the human kingdom?



We herd animals into concentration camps which we call slaughter-houses. We consume their flesh and blood for food. We trap them ruthlessly for personal adornment. We hunt them to provide ourselves with happy and so-called "gentlemanly" sport. With the cunning of human might we trample with bloody feet upon their Right, and they cannot war against us, or we might feel constrained to be more circumspect in our cruel selfishness. At least some of us can be at war for these children of God, fight for them, champion their Right against the unrighteous might of so many of their human brethren.

Wantonly we flout the Motherhood of our Mother Earth in innumerable ways. We prostitute her soil to ignoble ends. We cut down her splendid trees and desecrate her body with ugly structures, many of which subserve but the greed of man and his unheeding ruthlessness. And the war invades, where it is physically taking place, the peace of a myriad lives basking in her Motherhood—mineral, vegetable, animal and human. What wonder war if thus we set at naught the most glorious Motherhood in the world—the Motherhood of the very soil itself.

Ugliness invades our speech, our gestures, and seeks to vulgarize that music which should be the voice of the soul. Ugliness invades our leisure time; and the wondrous Creative Spirit of what we call sex, in which God would have us remember Him, is tragically desecrated in its prostitution to emotional gluttony.

In a way, the animals have first right to our protection, for they are among the youngest in the family of God. But are there not countless millions of human beings who live in constant destitution, starving, unemployed, miserably housed, uncared for—teeming with anxiety, despair and helplessness?

And are there not millions who live bereft of refinement and culture because calculated vulgarity has penetrated the as yet vulnerable bulwarks of civilization?

### **The Arjuna Spirit**

Such are among the pressing wrongs in every country against which the righteous-minded must take up the arms of their rectitude—wronges which come from the dominance of ugliness and cruelty among so many. And in the ugliness there is so widespread the spirit of vulgarity, of

crudeness, of coarseness, of lack of that refinement which is the acid test of true civilization.

It may be the lot of some of us to fight in Europe itself in the strength of physical armaments. It is well that we should so do. But it is the lot of all of us as patriotic citizens of our various Motherlands to fight against the many wrongs which besmirch their honour, and which thus add fuel to the fire of war wherever it may happen to break out. The war in Europe has been fed by wrong in every land. Its flames rise up into terrible heights because of wrongs suffered to endure in every land throughout the world. Less matters the actual place where war breaks out. More matters the fact that the war spirit is abroad throughout the world.

Therefore must we all fight, and none with more courage, wisdom, chivalry, hatelessness, or steadfast perseverance, than the Theosophist, armed as he is with the Truth whence all these virtues spring, and with a spirit of brotherhood which enfolds in its warmth his foe no less than his friend.

### **Homage to the Great**

For our encouraging, the greatness which rights wrong shines forth from those who

are round about us so that we may see it as we have never seen it before, and seeing it may become inspired.

Verily indeed is greatness ever round about us for our heartening. But often are our eyes half-closed so that we see without perceiving. In these days, greatness is displayed before eyes which must both see and perceive. No day passes without an act, and surely more than a single act, of heroism. No day passes without an act, and surely more than a single act, of chivalry. No day passes without a suffering nobly borne in uncomplaining fortitude.

In the name, and for every member, of The Theosophical Society, I as President salute with gratitude those who give to us the inspiration and strength of their greatness.

I salute all heroism, for each act of heroism helps us all to develop the heroic which is within us—as yet, perhaps not aroused by those circumstances which are the setting for heroism.

I salute all chivalry, for each act of chivalry helps us to become chivalrous, than which graciousness there is no finer humaneness for humanity.

I salute all who suffer, for in part it is suffering that burns away the dross of life and releases the splendour of its gold.

I salute all who go about their business in the spirit of simple duty, asking naught, but giving all with gladness, for from such are the truly great fashioned.

I salute all who use their wisdom to make reverence more universal, goodwill less circumscribed, compassion more sensitive, for to what other end is wisdom?

I salute all who act in the cause of Brotherhood, lest the world continue to forget its brotherhood and therefore cease not to flout it.

I salute these greatnesses of life which catastrophes so often call forth, and which this war is calling forth. I salute all these because to salute them is to seek to become like them. And I salute them in the name of Theosophy and The Theosophical Society, for each one of them is Theosophy applied, and each one of them powerfully advances the great Purposes of The Theosophical Society.

Above all, I salute the Elder Brothers of the world, whom we call Masters, who are the perfect embodiment of every greatness,

and whose perfect example inspires to greatness all who are treading the pathway They have trodden. In Their mighty power and in the omnipotence of Life Eternal the whole world is safe, even in its most terrible desolations. And when the need is greatest, and the cry of the world most urgent, then are these Elder Brethren most near.

### Ennobling the World

In these days, therefore, both Theosophy and The Theosophical Society are thus blessed with added power to ennoble the lives of us all. Each heroism, each act of chivalry, each suffering nobly borne, each willing submission to duty, brings Theosophy nearer to the time when it shall be afire in the hearts of all, and brings Universal Brotherhood the nearer to its conscious recognition by humanity. Is not, therefore, the path of the Theosophist, be he or be he not a member of The Theosophical Society, easier in these days, because the world is so athirst for it, though more strenuous? Does not the whole world need Theosophy and The Theosophical Society as perhaps it has never needed them before? And is not such a time as this, therefore, a time for



great rejoicing on the part of all Theosophists that their opportunities are so very wonderful?

To me it seems as if we Theosophists of today, and our predecessors, have been born in these times that we might enter into the spirit of a changing world, and through the Yoga allotted to us help to lift the world into its new stature.

The Yoga may be the Yoga of Safety, or the Yoga of Danger. The Yoga may be the Yoga of Heroism or the Yoga of Suffering. The Yoga may be the Yoga of Action or the Yoga of Contemplation. The Yoga may be the Yoga of physical Death, or the Yoga of continuing physical Life. The Yoga may be the Yoga of Ease, or the Yoga of Hardship. There are many Yogas, as the holy *Bhagavad Gita* discloses to us in discourse after discourse.

But the time is a time for Yoga, the Science of Union, to be performed by the many and not only by the few. In the towns and cities, in the highways and byways, in the villages and in every home, is to be heard the Call of Yoga, and thousands upon thousands give glad response.

Theosophy is the Science of Yoga, and The Theosophical Society is the Yoga of Universal Brotherhood.

### All Is Well!

Need I say to you, then, my brethren, that in these days all is well with Theosophy and The Theosophical Society? Need I give you facts and figures to help to convince you?

True, we have lost awhile a number of Sections—Russia, Germany, Austria, Italy, and now in a measure Czecho-Slovakia and Poland—crucified by the foes of Light. But in confidence we await their coming resurrection, and shall most joyfully welcome them again into the physical organism of The Society as they are ever in its mystical body.

All is well with Theosophy and The Theosophical Society as the world is drawn nearer to the great realities which they both embody and reveal.

Righteousness will triumph, and wrong will begin to turn its face away from its darkness. The future is sure, and our Science will become more shining and our Society grow the stronger as we advance, purified by the war, to the great Centenary

in 1975 which shall mark a splendid victory for the Light.

Therefore, as is said in the Gospel of St. John :

“ In the world ye shall have tribulation :  
But be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world.”

The Gods have overcome the world, and we who all are Gods in the Becoming shall overcome the world no less and make of earth a Heaven.



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## Section II

### The Subba Row Medal

The Executive Committee has recommended to the General Council that the 1938 award of the Subba Row medal be made to Mrs. Josephine Ransom for her admirable work in connection with the publication of the Adyar Edition of *The Secret Doctrine*, and for her *Short History of The Theosophical Society*. For 1939 the recommendation goes to Professor D. D. Kanga, Assistant Recording Secretary, for his most valuable compilation entitled *Where Theosophy and Science Meet*, a series of volumes which have been given great praise in the public press.

I wish to draw the particular attention of my fellow-members to Mr. E. L. Gardner's recent splendid contributions to our classic Theosophical literature. They are : *The Web of the Universe ; The Play of Consciousness*.

I propose to do myself the honour of submitting Mr. Gardner's name for the

award of the Subba Row medal in 1940, this to be my final submission as President during the years 1934-1941. Such an award would well be the keystone to our arch of Subba Row medal awards during these years.

### **Certificates of Honour**

It gives me the very greatest happiness to award to the Sections of The Theosophical Society in Poland and in Finland The Society's Certificate of Honour for the year. The heroism of the members of these two Sections, the sufferings they have nobly borne, and their loyalty to our Society throughout the whole of their crucifixion, win the reverent and affectionate homage of us all.

### **Indian Section's Jubilee**

I especially desire to salute, in the name of The Theosophical Society as a whole and of every member individually I am sure, The Theosophical Society in India on reaching in 1940 the great dignity of a Golden Jubilee. I regard our Indian Section to no small degree as the Mother-Section of our Society—less on account of its age, more on account of its being the *Indian Section*, the Section situate in the



ancient home of Theosophy, Brahma Vidya, the cherished land of so many of our Elder Brethren.

I invoke Their Blessing upon the Indian Section as it moves forward into the second half of its first century of service to India and to the world. And I most earnestly pray that 1940 may be a year consecrated to the preparation of the Section for the work that lies before it.

In December 1940, the International Convention of The Theosophical Society and the National Convention of the Indian Section will be meeting in Benares, the sacred home of the Section; and I am looking forward to a gathering such as we have rarely had before in Benares. It will be a great occasion. It will, I have little doubt, mark the beginning of a new and splendid epoch in the history of The Theosophical Society in India, channel as the Section is, not only for the diffusion of Brahma Vidya throughout the world, but no less for the strengthening, perhaps even for the essential establishment, of the National Brotherhood of India, one of the most glorious jewels-to-be in the Crown of the Brotherhood Universal.

Let every member of the Indian Section know himself to be very specially consecrated during the great year of 1940 to an utmost service of his Section, thus seizing this rare opportunity of proving his worthiness to be a member of the Indian Section and of that Theosophical Society which is the special messenger of the Rishis to the modern world.

### **The Fight for Freedom**

While the brunt of the war has so far been borne by Poland, and now also by Finland in spite of the allegation by Russia that she is not engaged in war with Finland, both France and Britain have organized themselves in a wonderful way for their crusade against unrighteousness, and I am constantly hearing of member after member who is giving his services to the utmost of his power. Both Sections find increasing difficulty in carrying on their usual work, but each is carrying on, so that both in France and in Britain the Flag of Theosophy remains mast high. This means much more sacrifice and devotion than might appear at first sight, and is very much to the honour of our two great Sections. Here and there are members who have conscientious objections to war. By

being brave about their consciences they, too, are doing their bit, as the saying is. "To thine own self be true . . . thou canst not then be false to any man." Nor to any nation the citizenship of which you may enjoy. For my own part I would fight if I could, though I am somewhat old for such service. But I have offered what I could to the authorities in India, for I know that not only is this war a war for the Right and must be fought, but also that India's help is needed in whatever way she can best give it. She herself must become free, but she will become free the more quickly as she takes her part in a world-wide fight for freedom.

### Real Education

I do not think I need say with what happiness The International Headquarters of The Theosophical Society has received Madame Maria Montessori and her adopted son Signor Mario Montessori. Adyar has had the privilege of welcoming many of the world's truly great, but welcomes with peculiar pleasure one who without doubt is the world's greatest scientist in education. Round her here are gathered over three hundred students hailing from all parts of India, and her courses of lectures

and demonstrations have been a revelation to them all as to the nature of real education. I am very confident that her visit will have a profound effect upon the new life that is beginning to animate Indian education, and I feel proud that The Theosophical Society has been chosen as the instrument through which her genius shall fructify this great field of the Indian Nation's life.

I wish Madame Montessori could travel through the length and breadth of India, but her stay here for this first time of her coming is necessarily short, and she will not be able to say "Yes" to more than a very few places among the many in all parts of India which have begged her to come. She will, I understand, lecture to the Universities of Madras and Calcutta, and to a few other educational bodies. But we shall have to wait for another visit, I hope in the near future, for her to effect that wider contact with a land and people which have already endeared themselves to her.

### **Culture and the Arts**

I must give myself the satisfaction of acknowledging both with pride and gratitude the extraordinary work achieved

during the course of this year, though the result of many years' strenuous labour, by Rukmini Devi in the field of culture and the arts. It is not too much to say that while on the one hand she is certainly revolutionizing the life of Adyar, on the other hand she is making a profound impression upon southern India where she has begun the renaissance which has been entrusted to her.

One of the most remarkable facts in this connection is the gathering round her of a galaxy of Indian genius working in the heaven of sound and in the heaven of movement. As one of the most honoured scientists in the classical Hindu dance said to me only a short while ago : " Rukmini Devi is giving us courage again. We had begun to despair of any revival in the Indian arts. We were fearing that there might be no new life in the arts to take its place side by side with the new life in politics, and to make politics more real. But now we have Rukmini Devi, and all will be well." I do not feel particularly clever in making the prophecy that in course of time she will not only help to give new vitality to Indian culture, but will also be able to help in drawing into

mutual understanding and therefore appreciation the culture of the East and of the West, for she has a deep insight into both.

### **The Pathway to the Future**

But amidst all these fine signs of the coming advance in the civilization of the world, let all Theosophists and members of The Theosophical Society remember that it is their happy, indeed glorious, privilege to worship unceasingly at the shrine of Theosophy, so that the mighty truths of the Universal Science shall slowly but surely exalt the consciousness of man as the waters cover the sea. Let each Theosophist worship in his own way and discover his own truths, for, though there be but one Truth, there are yet as many as are the pathways of man and of all other living creatures. There can be no monopoly where there is universality, and where life is, there is Theosophy.

Equal privilege is to members of The Theosophical Society, for they, together with others of the same blood, are the advance-guard showing the way and leading the way to the time when every human being shall be conscious of the Universal Brotherhood which has ever been the



supreme fact of life. Today, when war would postpone this consciousness, such pioneers are all the more in honour bound to declare its advent and to live it even now.

We can do no more than these. But these we can and must surely do, for our own sakes and for the sake of the world athirst.

